

The Ashland Daily Press

A Boost for Environment

July 5, 2007

The Interior Appropriations Bill passed by the House last week is meant, in the opinion of our congressman, Dave Obey, to change our nation's priorities when it comes to our environment.

It's about time.

"This bill provides for the crucial programs that defend the cleanliness of our air, that defend the cleanliness of our water and that protect the public health and the publicly owned natural resources of this country," Obey said in a statement.

For the past several years, institutions such as the National Park Service have been forced to cut staffs and programming, as well as research. In local communities, funds for important water and sewer infrastructure projects have decreased, and the environment in general has been a low priority.

To his credit, President Bush had proposed a budget that addressed to some extent the \$800 million annual shortfall experienced by the National Park Service. The Interior Appropriations Bill goes beyond that, giving the parks enough money to hire 31,000 new seasonal employees and 590 year-round staff.

The bill also restores some investment in the clean water revolving fund, which has been cut by 50 percent in the past three years. The money reinserted could help about 150 communities modernize water and sewer systems.

It also establishes a commission on global climate change, boosting research on climate change that is meant to give the EPA the tools to develop a process for regulating greenhouse gas.

All this represents a welcome shift in priorities toward protecting the land of which we are stewards.